

## HUMAN ECCENTRICITIES

Term Applied Only To The Foibles of So-called Men of Genius, But Called Insanity in Others.

(By M. Grier Kidder.)

No one knows where eccentricity ends and insanity begins, any more than where monkey stops and man starts; there is nothing abrupt in nature; nothing jerky about evolution. None of us think ourselves lacking in mentality, though several own to a few idiosyncrasies of genius. Everybody seems too busy diagnosing everybody else's mental symptoms to spare judgment for his own. Strangers are crazy; friends, peculiar; ourselves, original. We laugh at strange actions till greatness follows, then ape them; scoff at the insanities of mediocrity, worship the eccentricities of greatness.

Genius is rarely affected; the artificial belongs to the shallow; the natural, to the profound. The eccentricities of the great are generally due to the fact that few great men have time to be conventional. I hope this explains my indifference to some details. From ordinary folks nothing heterodox is tolerated and pronounced individuality in the average man in social sacrilege. Nobody can afford to be a crank unless he be reenforced with prestige. I know of no more pitiful object than an unrecognized genius trying to teach a community something he doesn't want to learn. Websters are absent minded; the rest of us, forgetful. Webster once consulted his watch to see if he had time to go home to get it. If a "nigger" displayed so much preoccupation, he would be called a lunatic. Which goes to prove that an ignorant man's reputation, like a poor man's or a woman's, is a very delicate thing.

The great Dr. Johnson couldn't pass a fence without touching every tenth picket with his cane. Stonewall Jackson thought one of his legs was getting shorter than the other. Both of these gentlemen could have been cured with Christian Science. So when your intellectual grandeur finds relaxation in tallying fence pickets or making a dinky pull your leg to counteract its fancied shrinkage, without risking your reputation for sanity, you are great. But first achieve the sense that breeds the non-sense. Don't, like too many of us, turn dam fool to advertise your wisdom.

The mind below mediocrity has no more patience with the mediocre mind than the mediocrity. We as naturally consider what is mentally below stupidity as what is mentally above us extravagance. The laborer can't believe that professional men work.

To him, there is no exertion unmarried to a shovel; nothing arduous divorced from a pick axe; nothing productive, unplanted in dirt and watered with sweat. Don't the Socialists tell us "the working man produces the wealth." Of what use is the engineer, doesn't the engineer do the work? That the brain can be harnessed to achieve the real, the mind geared up to produce the substantial is beyond the faith of those who believe what they imagine and doubt what others think.

So it is with those of average intelligence who see brutality in the great unwashed who grovel beneath them and insanity in the genius whose originality invites him to soar above them rather than to crawl with the mob or walk with the crowd. I don't claim that eccentricity is an unfallible sign of genius, the lunatic asylum, the Scheme of Salvation and the Socialist party would refute that. Two-thirds of the eccentricities are born of affectation married to self conceit. Every great man or woman is ever duplicated in some mad house. No body ever did anything extraordinary who wasn't aped by extraordinary fools. When Lord Salisbury once visited an insane asylum, the attendant glanced at his card and said: "You will have to wait for a vacancy. We are over stocked with Lord Salisburys." Joanna Southcote said she was to be the second mother of Christ, who, when you think of all the Virgin Mary emulators, seems to atone by his surplus mothers for his lack of father. Delusion is nothing but over grown eccentricity. A fool imitates the unconscious absurdities of the wise because it is his only way of appearing wise. Sometimes his imitation condenses into a specialty and, by the way it takes a mighty smart specialist to keep sane. When you meet a man in whom wish fathers belief or hope begets expectation, watch him. Variety is the spice of mind as well as of life. Specialties are prone to grow into runaway hobbies and run away hobbies generally head for congenial company.

Thousands outside of Bedlam ape the peculiarities of their mental betters; natural asses exploiting artificial assinity. I know a man who thinks he looks like Napoleon because his head resembles a prize pumpkin in size as much as it does an exhausted receiver in other details. This hydrocephalic polywog, like Lord Thurlow, "looks wiser than any man can be." He simply out-Napoleons Napoleon in his posings and escapes free board in a lunatic asylum, solely on account of his appetite." Then there is my friend C. who persists in digging me in the ribs with

his elbow to punctuate his remarks; every punctuation feeling like an exclamation point made with a pick axe. I wish C. would quit that. He can't understand that his intercostal tattoo instead of inviting my attention to what he says; anchors it to what he does. I am not his special prey. Several other estimable citizens have been seriously impaired. Yet a kinder husband and father than this perambulating pile driver, does not walk upon the earth. If this were not so I should have killed him long ere this.

Did you ever offer a chair to any one who did not move it before sitting in it? This comes natural to a man before sitting down, as turning round to a dog before lying down. The dog turns round because his wild ancestors turned round to crush down the grass. The origin of this chair moving must have been the shaking of a bush by our unpanted progenitors who naturally objected to sitting on a harnets nest or a snake. To test my theory, try to sit down on a bush without your pants on before investigating your seat. You can't do it; you feel instinctively there is too much at stake. A man never feels so hypothetical as when he sits down suddenly on something foreign without his pants. Pants, like health, can't be appreciated till you have none.

When a man looks at his watch and returns it to his pocket, instantly ask him for the time. He can't tell you without looking at it again. Delay your question for a minute and he can; but while the mind is absorbing the knowledge the question seems to efface it from the memory. The greater the mind, the greater the neglect of non-essential details. "Great men write bad hands" is a maxim. How, many bookkeepers write bad hands? About as many as get above book-keeping. There is little in a tread mill to inspire originality. Did you ever see an eccentric bookkeeper? The nearest I ever knew one to get to eccentricity was an expert accountant who went to church and never got drunk.

Many of these peculiarities are perhaps, "rudimentary echoes" of normal actions. It seems impossible to escape wholly from what was once an essential and ancestral characteristic. They are of no practical use, but, like the vermiform appendix, aborted ear wagging muscles and silent letters in orthography, linger as a memory of what was formerly functional. The Empress Marie Louise could flap her ears, so can I, so can another individual. In us three the gift seems to be derived from ancestors without environment modifications. I presume, therefore, that transcending mentality is not essential to the generating and fostering of this peculiarity. It appears to be an abnormal trait in which an ignoramus can indulge without exposing himself to the charge of affectation or presumptuous emulation.

(Continued on page 15.)